

Intro to Jewish Mysticism
HUM 226 Tuesday/Thursday 1:00-2:15 PM

RELI 104/MDST 103
Spring 2014

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This course will survey some of the central themes of Jewish mysticism. We will examine mystical expressions in the Bible, in late antiquity, in medieval Kabbalah, and in the contemporary world. We will explore such issues as divine presence in the world, visionary knowledge and the shape of the divine, the cultivation of insight and magical powers, and demons and monsters. Throughout the course, we will read the first-hand accounts and testimonies of Jewish mystics, in English translation, in class.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course fulfills a distribution requirement, and has the following aims:

1. To provide a phenomenological understanding of Jewish mysticism, and the requisite contextual background for textual and theoretical study.
2. To familiarize the student with key terms and concepts related to both the Jewish mystical tradition and to the academic discipline of Religious Studies.
3. To acquaint the student with the text-critical approach to the study of Jewish mysticism, through close readings (in English) of some of its major primary texts.

Through these objectives, students will gain an understanding of the various facets of Jewish mysticism and its academic study; this is regardless of one's personal background and/or convictions.

REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

You are expected to come to class having done the readings listed for the day of the class. Each unexcused absence after three (3) will result in two (2) percentage points per missed class deducted from your overall grade. Grading will be as follows:

Reading Responses =	20%
Film Review=	10%
Midterm Exam =	35%
Final Exam =	35%

For reading responses: These should be typed, double spaced, and should be about one half page in length. They should be e-mailed to me as Word attachments by midnight the night before the class session for which they are due. They will be graded as either a (+) or a (-), and **no late reading responses will be accepted**. The response should be directly related to the reading and can contain any question or comment. I may not be able to answer all the questions, but I will read them all and they will give me a sense of what you're interested in and what is confusing to you.

Plagiarism is unacceptable, and students are expected to submit work that is their own. Please familiarize yourselves with the Rice's policies on this matter, and please properly cite sources. Plagiarism is a serious matter, will result in an "F" for this course, and will be reported to the Honor Council. If you have any questions about this please see me.

If you have a documented disability that will impact your work in this class, please contact me as soon

as possible in order to discuss your needs. Additionally, you will need to register with the Disability Support Services Office in the Allen Center.

Readings will be posted on Owl-Space. The syllabus for this course is subject to change over the course of the semester. I will make updated changes available. Please make sure that you have access to your university e-mail and to Owl-Space, and if you do not, see technical support immediately.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

DEFINITIONS

- T 1/14 Introduction – Overview of the Course
- TH 1/16 Characteristics of Jewish Mysticism
Reading: (1) Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 3-18

KEY CONCEPTS

- T 1/21 God – Between Imminence and Transcendence (Ein Sof and the Sefirot)
Reading: (2) David Ariel, *The Mystic Quest*, pp. 65-88
- TH 1/23 Jewish Esotericism – The Nature of “The Secret” in Jewish Mysticism
Reading: (3) Moshe Halbertal, *Concealment and Revelation*, pp. 1-12

MYSTICISM AND THE HEBREW BIBLE

- T 1/28 Mystical Experience in the Hebrew Bible: Ezekiel’s vision
Reading: (4) Elliot Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 16-28; (5) Ezekiel 1:1-28
- TH 1/30 Secrets and “Understanding” the Bible
Reading: (6) Moshe Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 202-220

MYSTICAL IDEAS OF CREATION

- T 2/4 Sefer Yetzirah
Reading: (7) Gershom Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 24-35; (8) *The Book of Creation*, short version, translated by Aryeh Kaplan, pp. 261-267
- TH 2/6 Creation in the Zohar
Reading: (9) Arthur Green, “Introduction,” pp. 5-20; (10) *The Zohar*, Pritzker Edition, vol. v., pp. 545-555
- T 2/11 The Lurianic Myth of Creation
Reading: (11) Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 253-268

MYSTICAL PRACTICES

- TH 2/13 Other-worldly Journeys
Reading: (12) Joseph Dan, “The Religious Experience of the *Merkavah*,” *Jewish Spirituality I*, pp. 289-307

- T 2/18 Mystical Technique in Judaism
Reading: (13) Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 74-88
- TH 2/20 Meditation and Ecstatic Trance
Reading: (14) Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 126-135
- T 2/25 Mystical Experience and Drugs
Reading: (15) Itzik Lodzer (Arthur Green), "Notes From the Jewish Underground: Psychedelics and Kabbalah," *Response*, 1968, pp. 9-21
Take-home Midterm distributed
- TH 2/27 Film: *Pi*
- T3/4 SPRING BREAK
TH 3/6 SPRING BREAK

SEXUALITY AND GENDER

- T 3/11 Holy Sex
Reading: (16) David Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, pp. 101-118
Midterm due (sent via e-mail, as Word attachment, by midnight)
- TH 3/13 Hermaphrodites and Androgyny
Reading: (17) Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros*, pp. 59-81
- T 3/18 Gender Boundaries
Reading: (18) Wolfson, "On Becoming Female," in *Gender and Judaism*, pp. 209-228

ON THE INDIVIDUAL SOUL

- TH 3/20 Doctrine of the Soul
Reading: (19) Hallamish, *An Introduction to the Kabbalah*, pp. 254-271
- T 3/25 *Gilgul Neshamot* – the Transmigration of Souls
Reading: (20) Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, pp. 212-228
- TH 3/27 NO CLASS

THE REALM OF EVIL

- T 4/1 *Sitra Ahra* – Evil and the "Other Side"
Reading: (21) Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, pp. 56-78
- TH 4/3 MIDTERM RECESS
- T 4/8 Demonic Figures
Reading: (22) Joseph Dan, "Samael, Lilith, and the Concept of Evil in Early Kabbalah"

TH 4/10 Evil and the Emanation on the Left
Reading: (23) Isaac ha-Kohen, *Treatise on the Left Emanation*

ON SPIRITS AND MONSTERS

T 4/15 PASSOVER (NO CLASS)

TH 4/17 Spirit Possession
Reading: (24) Joseph Dan, *Spirit Possession in Judaism*, pp. 27-40

T 4/22 The Golem: The Creation of an Artificial Anthropoid
Reading: (25) Scholem, *Kabbalah* 351-355; (26) Yudl Rosenberg 34-38; 44-45; 182-186

CONTEMPORARY TRENDS

TH 4/24 Hollywood and the New Age
Reading: (27) Boaz Huss, "All you need is LAV: Madonna and Postmodern Kabbalah," 611-624
Take-home Final Exam questions distributed (due to me as e-mailed Word attachments by midnight, Weds., May 7)